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ABSTRACT

This guide focuses on ways that parents and teachers can help students with disabilities become involved in developing their own Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The guide is organized into lesson plans for use in classrooms. A section on "Laying the Foundation" offers five preparatory suggestions, such as photocopying each students' current IEP and informing parents about the effort to involve students. The following section offers nine suggestions for introductory work with students including finding out what students already know; informing students briefly about the relevant laws; and discussing accommodations. The next section suggests lessons and activities to introduce the IEP, such as discussion of the IEP process, showing an IEP noting individual sections, and having students look at their own IEPs. The following section is on ways to help the student work on writing his/her own IEP through class discussions, seatwork, one-on-one meetings with teachers, and homework done individually or with parents. Remaining sections offer 13 suggestions for getting ready for the IEP meeting, during the IEP meeting, and after the meeting. Three appendices provide an overview of the laws, possible answers to the student "disability" pre-test, and suggestions for presenting information on the laws. A glossary is also included. A "Student's Guide to the IEP" is also provided. (Contains 23 references.) (DB)

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Helping Students Develop Their IEPs [and] A Student's Guide to the IEP. NICHCY Technical Assistance Guide. Second Edition.

Lisa Kupper

January 2002

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NICHCY

TA2, 2nd Edition, January 2002

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GUIDE

A publication of the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities

Helping Students Develop Their IEPs

This guide is written for parents and teachers who would like to help students with disabilities become involved in developing their own Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). It is accompanied by an audiotape of teachers and parents discussing how they have helped students become active participants in the IEP process. NICHCY hopes that, together, the guide and the tape will answer many of your questions about involving students in planning their own education.

While the concept of involving students in developing their own IEPs may seem difficult at first, in fact, students have much to gain from being involved. During the process, they can:

- learn more about their strengths and skills and be able to tell others;
- learn more about their disability, including how to talk about and explain the nature of their disability to others;
- learn what accommodations are and what types of accommodations might help them succeed in the classroom;
- learn how to speak for themselves;
- develop some of the skills necessary for self-determination and independent decision-making;
- learn about the goals and objectives that form the basis for their education and why these goals and objectives are important for them; and, ultimately,
- become more involved in their own education.

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This guide is organized into lesson plans to help teachers use the student materials in their classrooms. However, parents can easily adapt the lesson plans to use at home with their child with a disability. These lesson plans are based upon the experiences of Marcy McGahee, a special education resource teacher who has worked with her students with disabilities for many years to involve them in the IEP process.

The plans are written in general terms, to facilitate their adaptation to other classrooms and other instructors, including parents. No indication is given as to how much time to devote to any one part of the lessons—**each reader must adapt the lessons to suit his or her own needs, schedule, and students.** The lesson plans are written with the assumption that readers have a copy of the Student's Guide audiotape and booklet to use with their students.

Some tips from the "experience files" of Marcy McGahee:

- Start working with students in the beginning of the year, when everyone wants to do their best.
- Tailor working with the IEP to the needs and abilities of each student. Not every student will be able to write his or her own entire IEP, but all should—and can—participate in some fashion. With some students, you may want to concentrate on only some of the IEP sections or on inviting and facilitating their participation in the process (e.g., describing strengths and interests, describing the disability, listing the accommodations that are needed, talking about future plans).

This technical assistance guide and its tape are designed to be used in conjunction with NICHCY's *A Student's Guide to the IEP*, a package that also consists of a student booklet and an audiotape. The *Student's Guide* package is designed expressly to inform students about the IEP process and motivate them to become involved. The *Student's Guide* is available by contacting NICHCY or by visiting our Web site: www.nichcy.org.

When to Involve Students

According to the law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, students of any age must be invited to participate in their own IEP meeting if a purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of transition services. By law, transition planning for students must begin at age 14 (or younger, if the IEP team determines it is appropriate). (See page 7 for a more detailed description of what transition planning involves.)

If the student does not attend the IEP meeting, the school must take other steps to ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered. Students have a lot to say about themselves, their strengths, their needs, their interests and preferences, and what they would like to do in the future. Just ask them!

This booklet is about giving students the tools to answer effectively.

- Realize that this undertaking requires a commitment of time. Your students will certainly benefit, and they are sure to surprise their teachers, parents, and even themselves. However, be aware — talking to students about IEPs and helping them prepare for the IEP meeting *will take time*.
- Start slowly, devoting time each week to talking with students about themselves and their IEPs. Talk weekly with students about their strengths, needs, learning differences, academic goals, and plans for the future. Work with them via worksheets, class discussion, individualized work, and role-playing. By slowly building a foundation and progressively building upon it, this work will not seem too overwhelming or indepth for students.
- Always tailor discussions and work to the needs and capabilities of your students. But don't underestimate them! As you well know, they can surprise you with their ideas, their understanding, and their desire and ability to participate and speak up for themselves.
- Celebrate each student's strengths and growth!

Laying the Foundation

1 Make sure that you have a copy of the *Student's Guide* audiotape for your students to listen to (for your convenience, the *Student's Guide* tape is on the reverse side of the tape for teachers and parents), as well as a copy of the *Student's Guide* booklet for each student. (Feel free to copy the booklet and tape; they both are copyright free.)

2 Photocopy each student's current IEP.

3 Read through each IEP and identify sensitive issues or areas where student questions are likely to arise. Pay special attention to "present levels of performance," diagnosis, medications taken, accommodations required, or any information that students may not be aware of or that may be sensitive. Many students are not aware of the goals that have been established for them. Be prepared to address these and any sensitive issue in a positive, discreet manner.

4 Inform parents that students will be involved in the IEP process. You can convey this information by listing it on the syllabus you hand out on back-to-school night, by sending a letter home, or by phone. Invite parents to ask any questions they have about their child's involvement in the IEP process. Suggest to your students that they also discuss the IEP process at home. Many parents may already have a copy of their child's current IEP. If not, sending a copy home to the student's parents may be useful.

5 Prepare any worksheets, handouts, or other materials you intend to use during your presentations about the IEP. Inform yourself (and the student's family) about the laws supporting the rights of individuals with disabilities. (See Appendix A for information about several important federal laws. Also see the Resources section of this guide.)

Introductory Work with Students

The lessons below carry with them no indication of how much time they will take, individually or collectively. Each numbered item tends to be a separate activity, to allow teachers and parents to break up the discussions across days and weeks.

It's important to be consistent—and persistent. Begin the lessons early in the year. Once you begin, try to devote some time every day, every few days, or every week to these types of discussions and activities. Overall, the process *will take time*—but it is tremendously worthwhile to take that time, moving slowly, taking one piece of the puzzle at a time, giving students plenty of opportunities to discuss, reflect, practice, review, and practice some more.

All items should be considered as suggestions. **Each reader must adapt the lessons to suit his or her own needs and schedule and the capabilities and needs of students in the class.**

1 Open the discussion.

Introduce the topic of *learning* to students. Spend some time talking with students about learning — how they learn, what's easy for them to learn, what helps them learn, what's hard for them to learn, what they (or others) can do to help them learn what's difficult. Write their comments and observations down (without identifying specific students' learning techniques or difficulties) on a poster, overhead, or chalkboard. Look for similarities in learning approaches. Point out differences.

2 Find out what your students already know.

Administer a questionnaire similar to the one on page 5, which is designed to (a) give you an idea of what students already know; and (b) lay the foundation for a discussion about disability and have students focus for a moment upon *their* disability. (Possible answers to this questionnaire are presented in Appendix B.)

Make sure students realize this isn't a test, just a way of gathering information and starting a discussion.

Possible adaptations:

- Some students may be able to work on the questions independently. Others may need to go over the questions as an individualized activity or merely listen to the class discussion that follows.
- If your students have serious difficulties with reading or writing, you may wish to simply ask students these questions and write their answers and comments down on the board or an overhead. Be prepared, however, for some silence and blank looks. Unless students have previously been involved in developing their IEPs, in all likelihood they will have difficulty answering these questions or not be able to answer them at all. If this happens, reiterate that this is not a test but a way of starting your class discussions about the "basics" about the IEP.

3 Give students a positive look at what's ahead.

After the questionnaire, it may be a good idea to tell students why the class has been talking about learning and why you asked them questions about something called an IEP. Some suggestions:

- Be brief and positive. The idea is to give students an overall context and unifying thread for the discussions and work you'll be doing in the months ahead.
- Tell students that, throughout the year, the class will be working on special lessons that will help them take part in planning their education.

(continued on page 6) ➥

Student Worksheet

Disabilities

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Directions: Answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge.

1. How do you learn best? What type of lesson really helps you learn? (For example, you like to read new information or hear it first, or you prefer to work in small groups or alone...)

2. What is a disability?

3. Do *you* have a disability?

4. There is a law that allows you to receive special services from the school. What's the name of the law?

5. What is accommodation?

6. Do you have any accommodations in your classes?

7. What's an IEP?

8. Do *you* have an IEP?

- Tell them they have the right to be involved in planning that education, and that you (their teacher), their parents, and other school personnel want to know what they think — what they want to learn, what they feel they need to learn, what type of help really helps, what they want to do in the future.

- Tell them you're looking forward to hearing their ideas, because it's their education and their input is valuable and valued.

4 Talk about disabilities.

Refer the class back to the item about disability on the questionnaire. Discuss, as a class, what disabilities are, the range of disabilities in the class and in the world in general, and some of the differences between disabilities. Ask students what's hard for them because of their disability, and what types of special help they find useful. Be sure to contrast this with references to their strengths and what they find easy. For example, "So you have trouble writing, which makes taking notes hard, but you sure listen well and you remember what you hear."

5 Show a film or video about disabilities.

Consider showing a film/video about disabilities to your students. Preview the film/video first and make sure that the content is appropriate for and won't be insulting to your students. For example, don't select a film/video about young children with disabilities; identify one that is age-appropriate. (The ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education has a database on available videos. You can contact the ERIC Clearinghouse at 1-800-328-0272.)

6 Tell students briefly about the laws.

Present information to students about the "Laws" (see Appendix A for a summary of the laws you may wish to mention) and their rights under these laws.

If you require students to make presentations in your class, this presentation on the laws is a good opportunity to model for them what you want in a presentation. For example, Ms. McGahee requires that student presentations have four components, and so her presentation on the laws incorporates the four components, which are:

(a) a keyword poster, where the student who is presenting writes down the keywords (not sentences) associated with the presentation; this helps students remember the information they are presenting and helps their listeners to take notes;

(b) a visual to support the presentation;

(c) note-taking—listeners must take notes on the presentation, usually tied to the keyword poster; and

(d) review after the presentation is finished.

(An example of these components, used in Ms. McGahee's presentation on the laws, is presented in Appendix C.)

7 Discuss accommodations.

Specifically discuss the concept of "accommodations" with the class. Refer students to the list of accommodations in their *Student Guide* booklets. Ask them what types of accommodations or special help are useful to them. You may be amazed at how simple — and astute — their answers are!

8 Discuss transition.

If you are working with students who are 14 years old—or younger, if the IEP team decides it is appropriate—you will want to introduce the importance of transition planning. Within a few years students will be leaving secondary school, and it will be highly useful for them to consider what lies ahead for them.

Beginning at age 14 (or younger, if appropriate), transition planning focuses on looking at a student's *transition service needs*. The IEP team, including the student, looks at what courses the student is taking and plans ahead for what coursework is needed to help the student prepare for his or her transition and other goals. This may include advanced-placement courses or a vocational education program.

At age 16—or younger, if the IEP team decides it is appropriate—transition planning includes looking at a student's *needed transition services*. The IEP team, including the student, discusses and plans for such areas as the student's: integrated employment (including supported employment), postsecondary education (including vocational training or continuing and adult education), independent living, eligibility for various adult services (such as vocational rehabilitation), or community participation.

Your initial discussion with students about transition can be brief, just an introduction to the concept, with more indepth discussion taking place later, or it can extend across weeks.

This is a ripe area for class discussion and student activity, as well as being vitally important to helping students make the transition from school to postschool settings, so be sure that the class (and each individual student of transition age) eventually looks at transition in some depth. (See Resources section of this guide for materials designed to help educators and parents help students with transition planning.)

Some questions you might consider to get the discussion rolling:

What types of things can we do after we get out of school? (study more, get some kind of training, work, participate in the community)

What would *you* like to do after you leave high school?

Do you know how to do that?

What do you need to learn to get ready for doing that?

What are your hobbies?

Do you want to study more after high school?

What types of jobs interest you?

And so on...

9 Assign each student a "disability-related" question to be answered.

For review purposes, or for more indepth exploration of the ideas presented to date, give each student a question about a particular disability or a word to be defined and explained. Examples:

Words to be Defined	Questions to be Answered
learning disability	What is an IEP?
auditory memory	How often does an IEP need to be done?
IEP	What is (name of disability)?
disability	What is 94-142?
accommodation	What is the IDEA?
emotional disorder	What is reasonable accommodation?
general curriculum	What is an amendment?
traumatic brain injury	What is educational testing?
mental retardation	What is evaluation?
hearing impairment	What is mediation?
	What is due process?

Have each student look up the word assigned or find out the answer to the question assigned, then report the information to the class. Provide books to assist students in their research, such as books from a professional teacher's library or school library, their own books, or your own. Have students put the information they

have discovered on posterboards, and display these boards around the classroom.

Possible adaptations: Of course, some students may not be able to do this activity without modification. If need be, adapt the basic idea of the lesson to the strengths and needs of your students. For example:

- If your students are not able to understand the words suggested above, change the words to be more appropriate for your students. For example, some of the words on the cover sheet of your county or school district's IEP may be excellent words for your students to investigate: "participants," "disability," "evaluation."
- Students who do not read can gather information in other ways, such as conducting interviews, watching videos about disabilities, or collecting pictures about disabilities from newspapers and magazines.
- Use some commercially available disability awareness packages. These often explain the various types of disabilities in simple, clear ways.

We've provided a "glossary of terms" at the end of this document. Many short fact sheets on disabilities are available from NICHCY as well. Visit our Web site—www.nichcy.org—or have your students visit, and download what you need.

Introducing the IEP

Again, the lessons and activities described below are merely suggestions. They will be time-consuming but will form the basis for student understanding of the IEP process and involvement in designing their own IEPs. Adapt the lessons as necessary for the needs and capabilities of your students.

Get yourself and your students ready to look at an IEP.

1 Prepare an overhead transparency or handout showing the type of IEP form your school or district uses. The IEP should be **blank**, waiting to be filled in. Also prepare an overhead or handout of a sample letter that the school might send home to parents to inform them (a) of the school's intention to evaluate the student, and/or (b) of an upcoming IEP meeting that has been scheduled. You will use these two items later on in this section.

2 Remind students that one of the class' long-term goals is to have them become more involved in their education—namely, helping to develop their own IEPs. Hand out the *Student's Guide* tape and booklets.

3 Talk briefly with the class about the IEP process, from the letter sent home to parents to the IEP meeting. Indicate the seriousness of the process, that it is required by law. You can use pages 4-5 in the *Student's Guide* to organize this discussion or assign them as reading homework or seatwork.

4 Play the *Student's Guide* tape for the class and discuss the information presented there. To prompt students, you might ask them questions such as:

What's an IEP?

What are some benefits of students getting involved in their IEPs?

Do you want to get involved in saying what's in your IEP?

How do you think this would help you?

What would you want to say, if you were involved in your own IEP meeting?

What do you want your teachers to know about you? Your friends?

Are there parts of your education or school work you'd change? Why?

Do you think you'd need to talk about this more, to be able to participate?

Show an IEP.

5 Using your overhead or handout of a **blank** IEP, go over what an IEP is, what it looks like, what the various sections are. *This activity can be fairly brief, and should be for the purposes of giving students a brief introduction to an IEP form.* Refer students to page 6 in their *Student's Guide* booklet, or write this information on a poster to support your discussion.

6 Go over the IEP sections one by one, talking generally about what type of information is to be included in that section. The most important sections to concentrate on, particularly in the beginning, are the parts of the IEP that describe the nature of the student's disability, "present levels of performance," and "annual goals." Suggestions:

- As you talk, give students concrete examples of the type of information that might go in each section. You may also consider showing an IEP that is filled out for a particular student, although be careful that the IEP doesn't belong to any student in the class and that all identifying information, such as the student's name and address, are thoroughly blacked out. No information should appear that allows the student to be identified.

- Similarly, any examples you use should not correspond to any student in your class. If students volunteer personal information or examples, that's great, but sensitivity to students' feelings and their right to privacy is of paramount importance.

- Take a few minutes to talk about the *general curriculum*—that is, the curriculum that nondisabled students use. The IDEA emphasizes student involvement in, and progress in, the general curriculum. This is because students with disabilities need to learn the same curriculum as nondisabled children as much as possible—for example, reading, math, science, social studies, physical education. In some cases, this curriculum may need to be adapted for students to learn, but it should not be omitted altogether. Participation in extracurricular activities and other nonacademic activities is also important. Each student's IEP needs to be developed with this in mind.

(continued on page 10) ➥

The Importance of Privacy

When it comes time for students to look at their own IEPs, you have to consider carefully the privacy issue and the contents of each student's IEP. There may be information in the IEP that may embarrass or surprise the student, and certainly it is his or her right to have all information in the IEP remain private.

The experience of several teachers who have involved their students in the IEP process suggests that, the first time you have students look at their IEPs, students do not tend to share the information with others, and other students do not tend to "nose into" their classmates' IEPs. Each student tends to be absorbed in looking at his or her own document. As the class discusses the IEP—in general, not in regard to any specific student in the class—personal information may be gradually shared. Trust builds as all students become involved in the process. Yet, this activity must be handled in such a way that no student's privacy is invaded by others.

Suggestions for maintaining privacy and respecting each other's feelings:

- Many teachers begin this lesson with a simple statement regarding privacy and the importance of "minding your own business," or they wait until someone violates another's privacy and quietly suggest that "we all look at our own papers."

- When you first hand your students copies of their own IEPs, keep the lesson short and general. The purpose of the lesson is to give students an opportunity to see that they do, indeed, have an IEP, and to look at what it says *generally*. They'll have more opportunities in the future to delve into its specific contents.

There are several sections of the IEP where the emphasis on student involvement in the general curriculum can be readily seen (e.g., present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives/benchmarks, special education and related services). Talk about the kinds of subjects that students learn in school. In the IEP sample that you are using to talk about the various sections of the IEP, highlight words and phrases that relate to the student's involvement in the general curriculum and how school staff intend to help the student take part in regular classes and activities in the school.

Have students look at their own IEPs.

7 Give each student a copy of his or her own IEP.

8 Put your copy of the **blank** IEP from the previous lesson up on the overhead. Using the blank copy as a guide, go over the various sections briefly.

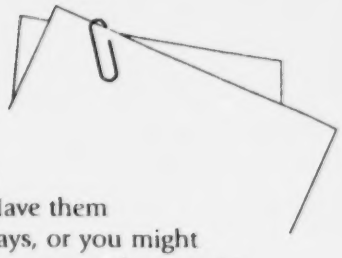
Important! The most crucial aspect of this initial introduction to the IEP is *not* to have students understand all of the details of their own IEP. Rather, the purpose of this introduction is to have students understand the overall: to see what the various sections of the IEP are, to understand that *they* have an IEP, to realize that, up to this point, they have not been involved in developing that IEP, but that they *can* be involved; and to realize how important their help is in developing their IEP. Don't get bogged down in the details at this point. All students will eventually sit with you, one-on-one, and go through their IEP in detail. This level of effort is not necessary in this initial introduction.

Suggestions:

- Have students find their name, their grade, and other identifying information. Is it really their own IEP?

- Have students identify the date of the last IEP and project the date by which the next one must be developed. They can write this date on page 6 of their student booklet. Even if the next meeting is a year away, students can still work on the IEP and, if necessary, call for another IEP meeting to discuss changes.

- Point out the disability section of the blank IEP (if there is one). Have students individually find this section in their IEP. Have them silently read what it says, or you might move around the classroom and point this out to them. Do not dwell on this section; just have them identify that it exists and contains specific information about them.



- Use the same brief process to have students locate other sections of their IEP, such as "present levels of performance," "accommodations," and "annual goals." Keep the discussion with the class brief, focused on the information generally, not its specifics. For example, are their goals divided into subject areas, such as reading, writing, mobility, and so on? Is there any mention of the student's involvement in the general curriculum? Are any accommodations listed to help the student participate in and progress in that curriculum?

- Have students find (or you might move around the classroom and point out) the place where people have signed the IEP. Who has signed the IEP — their parents, an administrator, their teacher? Is their own signature there? Why or why not? Would they like to have their signature on their own IEP? If so, then they need to participate in the process.

- ***Note:*** If any of your students cannot read or have difficulty reading, there are a number of ways you can accommodate their needs. They can tape record your explanation and listen to it later, as many times as they like, or you might prepare a tape in advance and make it available to them. You can also go over the IEP with them, one-on-one, at a later time.

9 Let students ask questions about the content of their IEP. Some suggestions and observations:

- For particularly sensitive questions, you may wish to answer generally, saying, "If you want to know more, we can talk later." Be aware that, in the beginning, students may wish to keep personal information private.
- Students may have a lot of questions about the goals and objectives listed in their IEPs, such as "Where do these come from?" and "Why wasn't I asked?" As appropriate, and respecting student privacy, some discussion of student goals and objectives may arise. For example, you can have students cross out goals they feel they have achieved or reflect *generally* upon the goals and objectives that have been established for them. Do they recognize that the work they've been doing in school is tied directly to the goals and objectives listed in their IEP?
- Always encourage students to discuss their IEP with their family.

10 After you have examined the IEP form and process with students, and they have had the opportunity to reflect generally upon the goals, objectives, and other information listed in the IEP, put the IEPs aside, either collecting them or sending them home for students to discuss with their parents. Briefly discuss how students feel about their IEP, the process by which it is developed, and the prospect of their being involved in saying what goes into the document.

11 You may wish to play the Student Tape for them again, for its motivational impact. Review the experiences of the students on the tape and solicit your students' impressions and ideas.

Writing the IEP

Generally speaking, having a student work on writing his or her IEP for the coming year requires a combination of:

- class discussions
- seatwork
- one-on-one meetings with you and perhaps other teachers, and
- homework done either individually or involving parents (given parental willingness and time to be involved).

Work throughout the year on the various sections of the IEP, taking each one individually and slowly, following a process such as:

- Re-introduce the section to the class (e.g., "Today we're going to take a look at that scary sounding part of the IEP called present levels of performance") and review as a class what has been said previously about the section.
- Have students discuss as a class what *generally* might go in that section. Write their ideas on the board or overhead. Add your own ideas and examples, as appropriate.
- Have students read individually what this section of their own IEP says. This activity, very personal to students, may take place as seatwork, homework, and one-on-one meetings with you and/or the parents. Allow or encourage sharing only to the extent of student comfort. As students build trust and a sense of community about being involved in developing their IEPs, more sharing is likely to take place spontaneously and can be very beneficial and motivating.
- Always offset discussions about what students can't do with discussion of what they can do. For example, when discussing the disability and present levels of performance sections, also discuss student strengths and abilities. When discussing goals and objectives/benchmarks,

identify what goals and objectives/benchmarks students have already achieved, as well as the ones that still need to be addressed.

As time for a student's IEP meeting draws near, you may need to intensify individual efforts with that student, meeting one-on-one with him or her to work through the various sections and prepare a draft IEP to discuss at the meeting. These individual meetings, and the work the student produces as a result, will be significantly enhanced if they have been preceded by class review and discussion of the IEP throughout the year. In fact, some of the work may already have been done! You may find that these individual meetings are a terrific way of reviewing and re-emphasizing the IEP contents, student strengths and needs, and his or her preferences.

Here are some suggestions for organizing this individual work.

1 Make an appointment with the student whose IEP is in need of review. You can arrange to meet with the student during class, during lunch, or after school.

2 If the student can work independently, have him or her complete activities 1-4 under "Writing Your Own IEP" in the *Student's Guide* booklet. If the student needs support in these steps, then sit with him or her and go over the IEP.

3 Have the student work on a "strength" and "weakness" (need) sheet for each class (Activity 5 in the *Student's Guide* section "Writing the IEP"). Encourage the student to cover this area as completely as possible, so that the other IEP participants do not catch them offguard during the IEP meeting. When students are the first to mention an area of weakness—for example, a student might say that he or she is disruptive in a particular class—their credibility in the IEP meeting is increased. Also help the student to produce a balanced list of strengths and needs; don't just have an enormous list of needs, with only a few strengths or abilities to offset it!

4 Focus next on helping the student to describe his or her disability. Is there a term for the disability (i.e., learning disability, mental retardation, visual impairment)? In practical terms, what does this disability mean? (For example, the disability means it's hard for the student to learn new material, or see very well, or get from place to place, or participate in certain kinds of activities...) Be sure to incorporate mention of the student's strengths into this discussion of disability.

5 Move on to annual goals and objectives/benchmarks. Did the student achieve the goals that are listed? Have the student list those goals that were achieved and those that were not. What changes need to be made in the IEP, to account for student growth and continuing or new needs? To help the student avoid listing too many goals and objectives/benchmarks that make up the goals, ask which five (or ten) goals and smaller objectives/benchmarks he or she feels are most important to work on? Are these realistic? Achievable?

6 The student may find it extremely helpful and productive to make an appointment with each of his or her teachers, in order to identify and discuss goals and objectives appropriate for each class, as well as student strengths, needs, and reasonable accommodations in each class (Activities 6 and 7). Talking with therapists or other school personnel may also be helpful.

7 Many students will be able to contribute information regarding their "present levels of performance." Most should be able to describe their disability and what accommodations are needed in school. They may want to talk about their work in the general curriculum and areas of strength and need in studying the same things that nondisabled students study. Help each student to put these descriptions into acceptable language, but be aware that, in the IEP meeting, the student will often use his or her own words.

8 As appropriate, address accommodations with the student (see Activity 9 in the *Student's Guide*) and transition planning (see Activity 10). Transition planning is an area that is ripe for both class discussion and individual reflection. What plans does the student have for the future? What would he or she like to do or be? What types of training or experience does he or she need in order to prepare? How can the school help?

9 Work with the student to prepare a draft of the new IEP, incorporating the changes, the student's work in the general curriculum, the areas of need, and the accommodations suggested. Be sure to pay attention to the "evaluation" section of the IEP, too. This section is where the IEP team identifies how they will determine if the student has reached a goal or objective. Officially, this is called "evaluation criteria" and should include:

- precisely what the student has to be able to do (e.g., identify 10 out of 12 words correctly; make the correct change 9 out of 10 times; complete all homework assignments); and
- how this information will be gathered (e.g., teacher-made tests, observations, student portfolio).

10 Have the student take the draft IEP home to share with his or her parents and to gather their input. Parents may have prepared their own draft, so that the family, together, can discuss and develop a draft IEP that reflects both parental and student thinking. In any event, a final draft IEP needs to be prepared to take to the IEP meeting (Activity 11).

11 Have the student send invitations to all the individuals who will be involved in the IEP meeting. An invitation might look something like this:

An Invitation

Please come to my IEP meeting and share your ideas.

Date: Wednesday, October 23rd
Time: 2:30 p.m.
Place: Meeting Room 4

Signed,

(Student's Name)

p.s. If you cannot attend this meeting, please let me know when we can meet to talk about my IEP. Thank you.

Getting Ready for the IEP Meeting

1 Have each student practice his or her presentation for the upcoming IEP meeting. Most students will benefit from numerous opportunities to rehearse! Students can practice at home with their family and with each other, if several have meetings in the near future.

Here are some suggestions for student practice.

- You may want to have students roleplay, on separate occasions, describing their disability, their strengths, their needs, the accommodations that would help them achieve in class, their goals for the future, and the goals they feel are most important for them to work on. Also have them practice thanking other participants for attending the IEP meeting. (These roleplays, of course, must be tailored to individual student capability. Students who are not able to address all these IEP elements should concentrate on sharing whatever they are capable of — what they would like to do, or a few brief sentences about their disability, preferences, or strengths.)

- You can be involved in the roleplays as well. For example, you might take the part of the student, while the student plays the part of a teacher or principal. This allows you to model certain behaviors or responses the student may find useful in the actual IEP meeting. Then you'd switch roles, and the student would play himself or herself, responding or behaving appropriately.

Students may find it particularly helpful to see you model how to respond when other IEP participants want to add or delete goals or objectives. Students should understand that it is appropriate for them to either disagree or agree with the proposed change, and to say why they feel that way. However, this may be difficult for many students, particularly if they are caught by surprise. You may wish to model making a response such as: "I would like to think about that suggestion. If we need to add it to the IEP, let's do it later."

Another situation for which students should be prepared is the possibility that another participant may say something negative that hurts or angers them. For example, a teacher might remark that "You have a chip on your shoulder" or "You never cooperate in class." Discuss with your students what types of responses might be appropriate. Model (and have students practice) appropriate responses such as "What suggestions do you have?"

2 Have the student work on maintaining eye contact with those listening, as well as volume and speed of delivery. It may be useful to establish some "cues" that you, or another participant, can use to remind the student if he or she is getting off track (e.g., not keeping track of the time, not maintaining eye contact, or speaking too loudly or softly). Practice these cues with the student.

3 If appropriate, have the student send out reminders to IEP participants a week before the meeting (see page 9 in the Student's Guide for an example).

4 Suggest to the other participants, before the meeting, that they not interrupt the student in the middle of his or her presentation. Discussion of issues can wait until the student has finished presenting.

During the IEP Meeting

1 All the hard work that the student (and you!) have done has come to this moment! Hopefully, all preparations, discussions, roleplays, and classwork will bear fruit in this meeting, as the student shares his or her ideas about what the IEP should contain.

2 The student may wish to greet all participants attending the IEP meeting, making sure that those who do not know one another are introduced. He or she should also make sure that all participants receive a copy of the draft IEP that he or she has prepared for discussion.

3 When the time is appropriate, the student will share his or her ideas with the rest of the IEP team. Depending upon his or her capabilities and degree of preparation, this sharing may range from describing his or her disability in a few sentences to actually leading the meeting. Whatever the level of participation, it's important that the student be able to share his or her ideas freely, without interruption. Hopefully, you have roleplayed in class what the student will say, and this part will go smoothly.

4 As mentioned above, there may be times when another participant says something that hurts or angers the student; describes the student in largely negative, nonconstructive terms; or proposes changes or alterations to the IEP that surprise the student. Any prior roleplaying you have done within your class may help the student respond appropriately in these situations. (Depending upon the level of the student's participation, and his or her ability to advocate, you may need to be the one who responds.) As necessary, help the student focus the discussion on positive steps that he or she can take, not on a recounting of his or her transgressions.

Note: One of the reasons for having students spend time developing a "Strength" and "Need" sheet is to circumvent the likelihood that an IEP team member will make such negative statements. If the student has already pointed out in his or her presentation that one of his or her "weaknesses" is not doing the homework, or not participating fully in class, then this reduces the need for others to do so.

5 At the end of the meeting, the student should thank everyone for their active part in planning his or her school program.

After the Meeting

1 Praise the student. Regardless of mistakes, he or she has accomplished much today and needs to be told so.

2 Have the student tell the class what happened in the IEP meeting.

3 Monitor the goals and objectives throughout the year and encourage the student to be aware of and monitor progress as well. Are the goals being addressed? Is the student working toward achieving them? How is he or she progressing in the general curriculum? Does the team need to come together again and change anything about the IEP? Goals? Classroom placement? Services being received? Have the student call another IEP meeting, if necessary. And be sure to prepare for that one, too!

4 And, as was said in the beginning of this guide, celebrate each student's growth! And celebrate your part in that growth!

Appendix A

Overview of the Laws

P.L. 94-142— Education of All Handicapped Children Act

Also known as the Education of the Handicapped Act, or EHA. Passed in 1975. Has since been amended several times, including the 1990 amendment which changed its name to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Provides federal funding to assist schools in educating students with disabilities.

The EHA (now IDEA) has many requirements. Among them:

- Schools must make available to students with disabilities a "free appropriate public education" which includes special education and related services that are, among other things, provided according to each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP);
- Each student with a disability who receives special education and related services must have an IEP;
- The IEP is created just for that student and states, among other things, the educational goals and objectives or benchmarks the student will address throughout the year;
- A student's IEP is developed in a collaboration between school personnel, the student's parents, and (when appropriate) the student; and
- A group of school personnel and parents (voluntary) must meet at least once a year to review and, if necessary, revise the IEP.

P.L. 105-17— The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

An amendment to the EHA (described at the left), passed in 1997. An earlier amendment (P.L. 101-476) changed the law's name to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA. The requirements listed for EHA remain intact under IDEA, and the following items have been added:

- Student involvement and progress in the general curriculum (the same curriculum as for nondisabled students) is now highly emphasized.
- Students of transition age (beginning at 14 years, or younger if the IEP team determines it is appropriate) must be invited to participate in the IEP meeting if a purpose of the meeting will be consideration of either of the two transition areas discussed below.
- ***Transition service needs.*** Beginning when the student is age 14 (or younger, if the IEP team determines it is appropriate), the IEP must address (within the applicable parts of the IEP) the courses he or she needs to take to reach his or her post-school goals. A statement of transition service needs must also be included in each of the child's subsequent IEPs.
- ***Needed transition services.*** Beginning when the student is age 16 (or younger, if the IEP team determines it is appropriate), the IEP must state what transition services are needed to help the student prepare for leaving school. This includes, if appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages.
- Transition planning includes discussing and planning for such areas as the student's: integrated employment (including supported employment), postsecondary education (including vocational training or continuing and adult education), independent living, eligibility for various adult services (such as vocational rehabilitation), or community participation.

P.L. 93-112— Rehabilitation Act of 1973

A civil rights law prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities. Section 504 of the Act prohibits schools from excluding students with disabilities from participating in programs receiving federal funding, simply because they have a disability. Important facts about Section 504:

- Section 504 defines a person with a disability as "any person who (i) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person's major life activities, (ii) has a record of such an impairment, or (iii) is regarded as having such an impairment."
- Major life activities are defined as including self-care, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and walking.
- Schools, as recipients of federal funding, are prohibited from discriminating against students who meet the definition of a person with a disability. Accommodations must be made to assist students with disabilities to participate in school activities, including classes.

Appendix B

Possible Answers to the Student "Disability" Pre-Test*

1. A disability is...

   a limitation

   an area where you're challenged

   something that makes it hard for you to (learn, walk, talk, see, hear...)

2. (individual response, based on student's situation and knowledge)

3. the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (formerly the Education of the Handicapped Act, EHA, or 94-142)

4. Accommodation is...

   when people make changes that will help you participate in activities

   changes in the way things are done, so you can learn better

5. (individual response, based on student's situation and knowledge)

6. An IEP is...

   a document that describes your educational plan

   an Individualized Education Program (or Plan)

   the papers that tell what you'll be studying this year

7. (individual response, probably "Yes")

8. (individual response, based on student)

*These are possible, somewhat simplified answers that students might give or that you might offer. Please refer to the glossary for the more formal definitions of words such as disability, accommodation, and IEP.

Appendix C

Presenting Information on the Laws

Using the presentation on the laws as an example, the four components of Ms. McGahee's presentation look something like this:

Keyword Poster:

The Laws

94-142 Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA)
signed in 1975
legal document
free appropriate public education (FAPE)
IEP once a year

105-17 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
amendment (change) passed in 1997
transition planning

93-112 Rehab Act, Section 504
accommodations
examples:
- books-on-tape
- more time on tests
- notetaker

The presentation follows the order of information on the keyword poster. If students are having difficulty understanding the material, they are permitted to stop her and request that information be repeated or said in a different way. She weaves stories of personal experience into the presentation —the types of disabilities that previous students have had and what types of accommodations they received to support their learning.

VISUAL: Ms. McGahee uses a copy of the Congressional Report on the different laws — the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the EHA, and the IDEA. This visual shows students concretely that these laws exist and are quite official. (See note below about obtaining a copy of the Congressional Report.)

NOTE-TAKING: Students take notes on her presentation, using the keyword poster as a starting point for their notes. (Some students may need accommodations or adaptations in notetaking, such as using another student's notes, using a tape recorder, adding words to a survival or reading word list, or using a computer.) The class goes over the notes they have taken, as part of a feedback loop about the note-taking process.

REVIEW: After the presentation on the laws is finished (it takes about 25-30 minutes), students are permitted to ask questions. The keyword poster is removed, and then Ms. McGahee asks the students questions about the laws; students use their notes and their memory to answer. Students are also permitted to share their notes, if this type of accommodation is appropriate for their learning needs.

Getting Copies of Laws or of the Congressional Report

The fastest way to get copies of the laws is via the Internet. There are many Web sites that offer online copies of regulations for IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act. For IDEA, try visiting:

www.ideapractices.org/idealaw.htm

For Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, visit:

www.reedmartin.com/
specialeducationresources.html

Copies of federal laws and regulations are also available from Superintendent of Documents, Attention: New Orders, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954. Charge orders may be telephoned to the U.S. Government Printing Office at (202) 512-1800. You need to be very specific about which laws you would like. For a copy of the IDEA, ask for 34 CFR Parts 300-399. (This law replaces the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA), so you need not request a copy of the EHA.) For a copy of Section 504, ask for: 34 CFR Parts 100 to 106. Section 504, as it applies to schools, is Part 104.

Copies of federal laws, as well as of the *Congressional Report*, may also be available from your Congressman. (The *Congressional Report* describes and summarizes laws in more everyday terms.) Write or call your Congressman and say you want the *Congressional Report* on a particular law (e.g., the IDEA) or a copy of the law itself or its implementing regulations.

Glossary

The following definitions have been compiled from a variety of sources. The contents of this glossary do not necessarily represent definitions endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education but, rather, represent how the terms are generally used in the special education and disabilities field. In cases where an exact definition (or other substantive discussion) exists within IDEA's regulations, we have cited its location within the *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* for Title 34. The "§" sign stands for "section."

Accommodation—something that meets a need; in special education, "reasonable accommodation" refers to how schools and teachers adapt, adjust, or change the physical environment, instruction or services for a student with a disability so that the presence of the student's disability does not unnecessarily affect his or her learning. The accommodations that are made are based upon the student's special needs. Examples of reasonable accommodation include allowing the student to take a test in a quiet area, use a tape recorder in class to take notes, use another student's notes, or use textbooks on tape. (See Question 4 in Appendix A of IDEA's regulations, published March 12, 1999, and available online at: www.ideapractices.org/idealaw.htm.)

Age of Majority—the age at which some states transfer certain rights to a young person, usually in young adulthood. The age is defined by the state. With respect to students with disabilities, if a state will transfer rights under IDEA (e.g., decision-making rights, procedural safeguard rights) to a student at age of majority, then at least one year before that time, the student's IEP must include a statement that the student has been informed of the rights under IDEA that will transfer to him or her. ("Age of majority" is addressed in IDEA's regulations at 34 CFR §300.347(c) and §300.517.)

Amendment—a change, revision, or addition made to a law.

Appropriate—able to meet a need; suitable or fitting; in special education, children with disabilities are entitled to a "free appropriate public education," commonly known as FAPE, which means that the schools provide the education (public) at no cost to the student or his/her family (free) and that the education meets the student's special needs (appropriate). (IDEA's definition of FAPE is found at 34 CFR §300.13.)

Auditory Memory—the ability to remember the main features of something heard, and/or to remember the sequence of several items heard.

Cognitive—a term that describes the process people use for remembering, reasoning, understanding, and using judgment; in special education terms, a cognitive disability refers to difficulty in learning.

Disability—the result of any physical or mental condition that limits or prevents one's ability to develop, achieve, and/or function in educational (or other) settings at a normal rate. (IDEA's definition of "child with a disability" is found at 34 CFR §300.7.)

Due Process—action that protects a person's rights; in special education, this applies to a set of legal steps taken to protect the educational rights of students with disabilities and carried out according to established rules. (Subpart E of IDEA addresses "due process procedures for parents and children" at 34 CFR §300.500 through §300.517.)

Dyslexia—a disturbance in a person's ability to read or learn to read. Dyslexia is considered a learning disability.

Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA)—Public Law 94-142, passed in 1975, which mandated that schools provide children with disabilities with a free appropriate public education; among other things, this law specifies how students are to be assessed for the presence of a disability, how the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is to be developed collaboratively and reviewed at least once a year, and what educational rights children with disabilities and their parents have.

Educational Testing—the tests that schools give students to see how students are performing in various skill areas; the tests may be group-administered or individually-administered. Schools typically use group-administered tests to find out how large numbers of students are performing and to identify which students are having difficulties in school. Students who are performing below the level expected for an individual that age may be referred for further testing, to see if the student has a disability. If the student is being tested for the presence of a disability, then testing must be individualized.

EHA—see Education of the Handicapped Act, above.

Emotional Disturbance—a condition that, under Federal definition, has one or more of these characteristics over a long period of time: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) behavior or feelings that are inappropriate under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. Having an emotional disturbance that adversely affects educational performance makes a student eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. [IDEA's definition is found at 34 CFR §300.7(c)(4).]

Evaluation—the procedures used to determine whether a child has a disability and the nature and extent of the special education and related services the child needs; also refers to the procedures used to determine a student's progress and whether he or she has achieved the goals and objectives/benchmarks listed in the IEP. [IDEA addresses evaluation of disability at 34 CFR §300.530 through §300.543. Evaluation of academic progress is addressed in IEP requirements at 34 CFR §300.347(a)(7).]

Free Appropriate Public Education—often referred to as FAPE; one of the key requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which requires that an education program be provided for all school-aged children, regardless of disability, without cost to families; the exact requirements of "appropriate" are not defined; what is appropriate is to be determined by the team that plans each student's IEP, based upon an individualized evaluation of the student's abilities and needs. (IDEA's definition of FAPE is found at 34 CFR § 300.13.)

General Curriculum—the same curriculum as used for nondisabled children. [See IDEA's regulations at 34 CFR §300.347(a)(1)(i).]

Handicap—see disability.

Hearing Impairment—used to describe a wide range of hearing losses, which can be permanent or fluctuating; for a student to be eligible for special education, the hearing loss must affect his or her educational performance. [IDEA's definition is found at §300.7(c)(5).]

IDEA—see Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, below.

IEP—see Individualized Education Program, below.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)—a written education plan for a child or youth with disabilities, developed by a team of professionals (teachers, therapists, etc.), the student's parents, and the student and others (as appropriate). The IEP is reviewed and, if necessary, revised yearly. Among other things, it describes how the student is presently doing, what the student's learning needs are, and what services the student will receive. [IDEA's regulations for IEPs are located at 34 CFR §300.340 through §300.350.]

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—a series of amendments to the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA). Amendments passed in 1990 changed the name of the legislation from EHA to IDEA, maintained the requirements of EHA, and added (among other requirements) the requirement of transition services for students aged 16 or older (and, in many cases, younger). Most recent amendments to IDEA were passed in 1997, and transition requirements for students age 14 (or younger, if determined appropriate by the IEP team) were added.

Learning Disability—a disorder in one or more of the basic processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language; as a result of a learning disability, students may have an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; mental retardation; emotional disturbance; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. Typically, students with learning disabilities are eligible for special education and related services. [IDEA's definition is found at 34 CFR §300.7(c)(10).]

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)—an educational setting or program that provides a student with disabilities with the chance to be educated, to the maximum extent appropriate, with children who do not have disabilities. Under the IDEA's LRE provisions, special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of a child with disabilities from the regular educational environment may occur only if the nature or severity of the student's disability is such that his or her education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (IDEA's general LRE requirements are found at §300.550.)

Mediation—an approach to resolving disputes where the two parties who are disagreeing sit down with an impartial third person (called a mediator), talk openly about the areas of conflict, and try to reach an agreement. (IDEA's mediation requirements are located at 34 CFR §300.506.)

Mental Retardation—a condition that causes individuals to function at an intellectual level that is significantly below average and to have difficulties with and deficits in adaptive behavior. Students with mental retardation that adversely affects their educational performance are eligible for special education and related services. [IDEA's definition is found at 34 CFR §300.7(c)(6).]

Placement—where the student will receive his or her special education and related services.

Public Law 93-112—see Rehabilitation Act of 1973, below.

Public Law 94-142—see Education of the Handicapped Act, above.

Public Law 101-476—amendment to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), passed in 1990. See Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, above.

Public Law 105-17—the most recent amendment to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), passed in 1997. See Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, above.

Reasonable Accommodation—see Accommodation, above.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973—a federal law that addresses discrimination against people with disabilities; the law has different sections pertaining to different areas of discrimination. Of particular importance to school-aged students with disabilities is Section 504, which protects such students from being excluded, solely on the basis of their disability, from participation in any program or activity receiving federal funds. The law also introduced the concept of "reasonable accommodation."

Related Services—transportation and developmental, corrective, and other supportive services that a student with disabilities requires in order to benefit from education. Related services include but are not limited to: speech/language pathology, audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation (including therapeutic recreation), early identification and assessment of disabilities in children, counseling services (including rehabilitation counseling), orientation and mobility services, medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes, school health services, social work services in schools, and parent counseling and training. (IDEA's definition is found at §300.24.)

Screening—a procedure in which groups of children are examined and/or tested, in order to identify children who are at risk of educational or other problems; the children who are identified are then referred for more intensive evaluation and assessment.

Section 504—an important section of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities; see Rehabilitation Act of 1973, above.

Special Education—programs, services, or specially designed instruction (offered at no cost to families) for children over 3 years old with special needs who are found eligible for such services; these include special learning methods or materials in the regular classroom, and special classes and programs if the student's learning or physical problems indicate this type of program. [IDEA's definition is found at §300.26.]

Special Needs—often used in the phrase "a child with special needs," this term is used to describe a child who has disabilities or who is at risk of developing disabilities and who, therefore, requires special services or treatment in order to progress.

Transition Planning—in special education, when the IEP team looks at the student's transition from high school to the adult work. The process must begin at least by age 14 with the team looking at what courses the student is taking and what coursework is needed to prepare the student for post-school goals (this is called considering the student's *transition service needs*). The process also includes looking at the student's *needed transition services*, beginning no later than age 16, and planning for such areas as integrated employment, postsecondary education, independent living, eligibility for adult services, or community participation. The student must be invited to attend the IEP meeting if a purpose of the meeting will be consideration of transition planning. [IDEA's definition of transition services is found at §300.29. Its requirements for transition statements in the IEP is found at §300.347(b).]

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)—an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability (or both) or psychosocial impairment that adversely affects how a student performs in school. This type of injury applies to open or closed head injuries that can result in impairments in one or more areas such as: cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, or motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; information processing; physical functions; and speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or those induced by birth trauma. Children with TBI are eligible for special education and related services. [IDEA's definition is found at §300.7(c)(12).]

Resources

A selection of resources is listed below to help readers locate more indepth information on the many issues raised in this technical assistance guide to *Helping Students Develop Their IEPs*. We have also provided contact information for the publishers from which you can obtain these resources. Be aware that there are also many other books, articles, and videotapes available on such subjects as the laws, student involvement in the IEP process, self-determination, and transition planning; the list below is intended to serve as a starting point.

Many states have projects in self-determination, transition planning, or student involvement in the IEP. To find out if any such project exists in your state, contact your local director of special education or your state director of special education. The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition also offers information on transition issues. Call the Center at (612) 624-2097, or visit its Web site at: http://ici.umn.edu/ncset.

Information about the Laws

Hanlon, G.M. (Producer). (1998). *A new IDEA for special education: Understanding the system and the new law* [video]. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Küpper, L., & Gutiérrez, M. (Eds.). (2000). Questions and answers about IDEA. *NICHCY News Digest*, No. 21, 1-28. (Available online at: www.nichcy.org/pubs/newsdig/nd21.htm)

Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center. (n.d.). *Section 504: Guidelines for educators*. Logan, UT: Author.

Sorenson, B. (Compiler). (2000, July). *Resources on special education laws* (ERIC EC Minibib EB26). Arlington, VA: ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education. (Available online at: http://ericec.org/minibibs/eb26.html)

Storms, J., O'Leary, E., & Williams, J. (2000). *Transition requirements: A guide for states, districts, schools, universities and families*. Eugene, OR: Western Regional Resource Center. (Available online at: http://interact.uoregon.edu/WRRC/tmfiles/tmcontents.htm)

West, L., Corbey, S., Boyer-Stephens, A., Jones, B., Miller, R., & Sarkees-Wircenski, M. (1999). *Integrating transition planning into the IEP process* (2nd ed.). Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

Involving Students in IEP Development & Transition Planning

Halpern, A.S., Herr, C.M., Doren, B., & Wolf, N.K. (2000). *NEXT S.T.E.P.: Student transition and educational planning*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed. (Set includes a teacher's manual, 5 student workbooks, 50 brochures, an instructional videotape, and a copy of *Teachers Talking to Teachers*, all in a sturdy storage box.)

Hughes, C., & Carter, E.W. (2000). *The transition handbook: Strategies high school teachers can use that work!* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Marshall, L.H., Martin, J.E., Hughes, W., Jerman, P., & Maxson, L. (1997). *Choosing personal goals kit*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West. (Kit includes teacher manual, blackline masters, 25 assessments, and a videotape.)

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Visit These Web Sites!

National Program Office on Self-Determination:
www.self-determination.org/index.htm

National Coalition on Self-Determination:
www.oaksgroup.org/nconsd/

S.A.B.E. (Self Advocates Becoming Empowered):
www.sabeusa.org/

Center on Self-Determination:
http://cdrc.ohsu.edu/selfdetermination/

Transition Research Institute at Illinois:
www.ed.uiuc.edu/sped/tri/institute.html

Publishers

Council for Exceptional Children, 1110 North Glebe Road, Arlington, VA 22201. Telephone: 1-888-232-7733. E-mail: service@cec.sped.org
Web: www.cec.sped.org/index.html

ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, 1110 North Glebe Road, Arlington, VA 22201. Telephone: 1-800-328-0272.
Web: http://ericec.org

Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 102 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455. Telephone: (612) 624-6300.
Web: www.ici.umn.edu/default.html

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Paul H. Brookes Publishing, P.O. Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285. Telephone: 1-800-638-3775.
Web: www.brookespublishing.com

Pro-Ed, 8700 Shoal Creek Boulevard, Austin, TX 78758. Telephone: 1-800-897-3202. Web: www.proedinc.com

Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports, Virginia Commonwealth University, P.O. Box 842011, Richmond, VA 23284-2011. Telephone: (804) 828-1851.
Web: www.worksupport.com

Self-Determination Synthesis Project, Department CSPC, College of Education, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte NC 28223-0001. Telephone: (704) 687-3736.
Web: www.uncc.edu/sdsp/

Sopris West, 4093 Specialty Place, Longmont, CO 80504. Telephone: (303) 651-2829.
E-mail: customerservice@sopriswest.com
Web: www.sopriswest.com

Western Regional Resource Center (WRRC), 1268 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1268.
Telephone: (503) 232-9154.
Web: http://interact.uoregon.edu/wrrc/wrrc.html

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U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

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NICHCY

A Student's Guide to the IEP

by
Marcy McGahee-Kovac

2nd Edition, 2002

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The *Student's Guide* series is written especially for students with disabilities. *A Student's Guide to the IEP* is the first in the series. You may also be interested in *A Student's Guide to Jobs*. We welcome your comments and encourage you to suggest future topics for the series. Please share your ideas with our staff by writing to the Editor.

Second Edition, 2002

The *Student's Guide* package includes this printed *student booklet*; a *technical assistance guide* for parents, transition specialists, and others interested in helping students get involved in developing their IEPs; and an *audiotape* featuring students, their parents, and school staff who share their stories about student participation in writing the IEP.

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Welcome to Your IEP!!

This guide will tell you:

- ✓ what an IEP is
- ✓ why you need to be part of your IEP team
- ✓ how to help write your IEP
- ✓ and much, much more!!

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Being a part of the team that writes your IEP
is an exciting, important thing to do.
It's your education—be in on planning it!

What is an IEP?

1 What is an IEP?

IEP stands for Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a written document that describes the educational plan for a student with a disability. Among other things, your IEP talks about your disability, what skills you need to learn, what you'll do in school this year, what services your school will provide, and where your learning will take place.

2 Why Do Students With Disabilities Need an IEP?

First, it's the law. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires each student with disabilities who receives special education services to have an IEP —an educational program written just for him or her.

Second, the IEP helps the school meet your special needs. It also helps you plan educational goals for yourself. That is why it is called an IEP—because it is an *individualized* education program.

3 What is the Purpose of an IEP?

The purpose of the IEP is to make sure that everyone—you, your family, and school staff—knows what your educational program will be this year.

4 Where is the IEP Developed?

The IEP is developed during an IEP meeting. The people who are concerned with your education meet, discuss, and develop your IEP goals for the next year.

5 Who Comes to the IEP Meeting?

Certain individuals will help write your IEP. We've listed these below. Some are required by law to come to the meeting. (In the list below, we've written these people in **bold letters**.) Others, such as you and your parents, must be *invited* to take part in the meeting. It's your choice to attend or not. (We've listed these people without any bolding of the letters.) All of the people listed below work together as a team to write your IEP. So—who might you see at the meeting?

- You
- Your parents
- At least one of your **regular education teachers**, if you are (or may be) taking part in the regular education environment

- At least one of your **special education teachers** (or **special education providers**)
- **Someone who can talk about your evaluation results** and what they mean, especially what kind of instruction you need
- **Someone from the school system** who knows about special education services and educating students with disabilities and who can talk about what resources the school system has—this person may be your principal, a school counselor, or someone else from the school system
- People from transition service agencies (such as vocational rehabilitation), if you're going to be talking about what you plan to do after leaving high school and what you need to do now to get ready
- Other people who know you—your strengths and needs—very well and who can help you plan your educational program

6 How Often is the IEP Meeting Held?

The law requires that your IEP is reviewed and, if necessary, revised at least once a year. This means attending at least one IEP meeting each year. However, you, your parents, or the school can ask for more IEP meetings, if any of you think that it's necessary to take another look at your IEP.

7 How Long Does an IEP Meeting Last?

Approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour.

8 Why Should I Participate in the IEP Meeting?

It's *your* educational program everyone will be discussing in the meeting. Your opinions are an important part of this discussion.

9 What Should I Do if I Want to Help Develop my IEP?

There are five basic steps:

1. Talk to your parents and teachers.
2. Review last year's IEP.
3. Think about your strengths and needs in school.
4. Write your goals for this school year.
5. Practice what you want to say at the meeting.

More details on these steps are given in this booklet. Keep reading!

How Do I Develop My IEP?

What to Do Before the IEP Meeting

1 Tell your family and teachers that you are interested in participating in your next IEP meeting. It is important that you have the support of your parents and teachers, because they will play a major role in helping you.

2 Ask your parents or teachers when your next IEP is due to be reviewed. Write the date below.

Next IEP Date:

_____

3 Ask your parents or teachers for a copy of your current IEP.

4 Read your IEP carefully. The IEP has different sections. These sections are listed in the box on the right. Look at the information in the box. Look at your IEP. Can you find the different sections or this information in your IEP?

5 Ask your parents or teachers to explain what is written in your IEP, section-by-section. Ask questions. Make sure you understand the sections and information in your IEP.

Sections of the IEP

By law, your IEP must include certain information about you. This information is usually organized into the sections listed below. Your new IEP will also have these sections or information.

- *Present levels of educational performance:* This section includes precise information about how you are doing in school and sometimes in other aspects of your life
- *Goals* for the year, broken down into short-term *objectives or benchmarks*
- What *special education and related services* the school will provide to you
- An explanation of how much of your school day (if any) you will spend *not participating with children without disabilities* in the regular class and other school activities
- The *modifications* you will need when state or district-wide tests are given, or an explanation of why taking these tests is not appropriate for you; if you won't be taking these tests, then your IEP must say how you will be tested instead
- *When* and *where* the school will start providing services to you, *how often* the services will be provided, and *how long* the services are expected to last
- How the school will measure your *progress* toward your goals and how the school will tell your parents about your progress
- The *transition services* you need to get ready for life after finishing high school

_____

One final note about what's on your IEP:

- If your state transfers rights to young people when they reach the *age of majority*, then at least one year before that time your IEP must state that you have been told about any rights that will transfer to you.

Writing Your IEP

1 You'll need several sheets of clean paper, and a pencil or pen. (If you like using a computer, that's fine, too. So is a tape recorder! You can also have a friend take notes for you.)

2 Start by describing your disability.

What is your disability called?

How does your disability affect you in school and at home? (For example, what things in school are harder because of your disability?)

What do you think is important for others to know about your disability?

If you aren't sure what to say, think about what the students on the tape had to say. How did they describe their disabilities?

3 Look at your old IEP goals (including the short-term objectives or benchmarks). Do you think you have met those goals and objectives/benchmarks? (This means you can do the things listed there.) Put a check next to the goals and objectives you have met.

4 What goals and objectives/benchmarks have you NOT met? Write these down on paper. They may be important to include in your new IEP.

5 What are your strengths and needs in each class or subject? Make a list. This can be hard to do. Here are some suggestions to help you:

- Start with clean sheets of paper. Title one sheet "Strengths" and another sheet "Needs."
- Ask yourself the questions on the next page (see the box). These can help you think about your strengths and needs. Write your ideas down on your "Strengths" and "Needs" worksheets.

Hints: If you're not sure how to answer a question, look at the examples given. Also, think about what the students on the tape had to say. How did they describe their strengths and needs? What accommodations did they ask for? What did they say they needed to work on in school?

6 Show the goals in your old IEP to your parents and your teachers. Do they think you have met these goals? What goals haven't you met? Add their ideas to the list you started in Step 4 above.

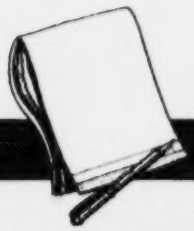
7 Ask your teachers what they believe your strengths and needs are in each class or subject. Write their ideas down.

8 Develop new goals and objectives/benchmarks for this year, using the list of strengths and needs you and your parents and teachers developed.

9 Describe the accommodations you may need in each class to meet these new goals and objectives. (See page 10 for a list of common accommodations.)

10 Think about your plans for the future and what you'll do after you've finished high school. Talk with your parents and teachers about what you should be doing this year to get ready. This is called *transition planning*.

11 Work with your parents and teachers to write a draft IEP document that includes all the information above. Make a copy for yourself to take to the IEP meeting. Make copies for everyone else who will be at the meeting.



Ask Yourself...

- *What classes do you take?* Make a list.
- *Which is your best class?*
- *What can you do well in this class?*

  These are your **strengths**. (Example: read, write, listen, work in groups, work alone, draw, do your homework...)
- *What helps you do well?*

  These can also be your strengths. (Examples: Your interest in the subject, your memory, patience, determination, effort, the help of others (what, specifically?), the way the teacher presents new information...)
- *What class is hardest for you?*
- *What's the hardest part of this class for you?*

  These are the areas you need to work on during the school year. (Examples: Paying attention, reading the book, listening, staying in the seat, remembering new information, doing homework, doing work in groups...)
- *What accommodations would help you do better in this class?*

  Look at the list of accommodations on page 10. Write down the ones you think would help you in this hard class.
- *What do you need to work on in your other classes?*

  Go class by class and make a list of what is hard for you in each one. Be specific—for example, in math class, you might find "fractions," "word problems," or some other math skill very difficult.
- *What accommodations would help you in each class?*

  For each class, list what accommodations, if any, would help you.

Getting Ready for the IEP Meeting

1 Talk to your special education teacher or regular education teacher about setting a time, date, and place for the IEP meeting. Make a list of who should be there.

2 Once the meeting is set, send everyone on your list an invitation like the example below.

> **An Invitation**
>
> Please come to my IEP meeting and share your ideas.
>
> Date: Wednesday, October 23rd
> Time: 2:30 p.m.
> Place: Meeting Room 4
>
> Signed,
>
> Your name
>
> p.s. If you cannot attend this meeting, please let me know when we can meet to talk about my IEP. Thank you.

3 To get ready for your IEP meeting, it's a good idea to think about what you want to say. At the meeting, you want to be able to:

- describe your disability
- talk about your strengths and needs
- describe your learning style (how you learn best and what gets in the way of your learning)
- tell team members the accommodations you need and why you need them
- describe any medications you are taking or medical needs you have (if you wish to share this information)
- list your educational goals and objectives/ benchmarks
- talk about your transition plan for the future.

4 It's also a good idea to practice what you want to say. Practice with your parents, a classmate, or a teacher. [Parents need to know what your goals are before the meeting, so they can support your decisions.]

5 One week before the IEP meeting, you may wish to send out reminders to the people who will be attending: your parents, teachers, principal, and others who have been invited. The note can be simple, such as the example below.

> **Just to Remind You...**
>
> I'm looking forward to seeing you at my IEP meeting.
>
> Wednesday, October 23rd
> 2:30 p.m., Meeting Room 4
>
> Signed,
> Your name

Participating in Your IEP Meeting

1. Make sure everyone knows each other. You may want to introduce them or have them introduce themselves.

2. Speak up and maintain good eye contact.

List of Accommodations

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is another important federal law for people with disabilities. This law states that reasonable accommodations must be made. But what are reasonable accommodations?

Reasonable accommodations are things the school or your teacher can do to make it easier for you to learn—adapting or adjusting what you're learning or how they're teaching.

Some common accommodations schools make for students with disabilities are listed below.

Note-taking Accommodations

- Use a tape recorder in the classroom
- Use another student's notes
- Have a notetaker in the class
- Use teacher's notes
- Use computer or typewriter

Test Taking Accommodations

- Extended time on test
- Take test in quiet area
- Have test read to you
- Take test orally

Additional Accommodations

- Use textbooks-on-tape
- Have extra set of books for home and school
- Restroom use (medical accommodations)
- Use a calculator or dictionary in class
- Have additional time to get from class to class
- Have seating in front of class
- Have extended time to take PSAT or SAT

3 Talk about the things you practiced, including:

- your disability
- the strengths and needs you have in each of your classes
- your learning style
- the accommodations you need and why you need them
- your goals and objectives for the next year
- your transition plans for the future.

4 Ask for additional suggestions and comments on your IEP content. Be sure everyone has a chance to talk and share their ideas.

5 Listen to ideas and suggestions from the other IEP team members. If you don't understand something, ask for an explanation.

6 Share your feelings about the goals and objectives the other team member suggest. Try to come to agreement about what goals and objectives are important to list in your IEP. (If you cannot finish in the time you have, set a time and date for another meeting.)

7 Write down (or have someone else write down) everything that's been decided, so that a final IEP can be written.

8 When the meeting is over, thank everyone for attending.

After the IEP Meeting

1 Ask for a copy of the final IEP document. Go over it to be sure you understand what it says.

2 Keep this copy of the IEP, so you can look over it whenever you need to.

3 Work to accomplish the goals and objectives/benchmarks in your IEP.

4 Review your IEP throughout the year. If anything needs to be changed—for example, you've met goals in a class and want to write new goals, or you need more help with a subject—ask your special education teacher, your regular education teacher, or your parents to schedule another IEP meeting.

A Final Word...

You have planned for your high school education and thought about your future. It begins today. Good luck!

The *Student's Guide* is part of a set that includes this student booklet; a technical assistance guide for parents, teachers, and others; and an audiotape. NICHCY also disseminates other materials and can respond to individual requests for information. For further information or assistance, or to receive a NICHCY *Publications Catalog*, contact NICHCY, P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013. Telephone: 1-800-695-0285 (Voice/TTY) and (202) 884-8200 (Voice/TTY). You can e-mail us (nichcy@aed.org) or visit our Web site (www.nichcy.org), where you will find all of our publications.

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